

People *in motion*



By Matt Hiebert
Photography by Cathy Morrison

Reggie House Surveyor

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Location: Willow Springs, Mo.

Position: Survey party chief, MoDOT’s South Central District

Background: House has been a MoDOT surveyor for 18 years. He started out as a head chainman, the person who led the survey crew as it measured an area.

“No matter how big the job, we’d measure the whole thing with a 100-foot-long chain,” House says. “There were many times when we’d have to cut through a lot of brush. With the new equipment, we don’t have to do that as much.”

Fortunately, modern technology has eliminated the need for two men to tramp through the woods with a chain. Now by projecting an infra-red beam into a system of prisms, House and his crew can measure much longer distances, and even “shoot through” thick vegetation, he says. But, he adds, the biggest advantage the new technology offers is that it minimizes the surveyor’s contact with traffic, making the job a lot safer.

The Job: House’s crew consists of himself and two other surveyors. Often they are the first members of MoDOT on a job site. As a result, they frequently have to plot and measure long stretches of untamed Missouri countryside.

“We’ve had people get turned around and end up lost in the middle of nowhere,” House says. “And, of course, we deal with the elements every day.”

Besides nasty weather, those elemental challenges sometimes crawl in on eight legs.

“The ticks and chiggers can get pretty bad in some places,” he says.

How It’s Done: House’s job covers a wide range of duties. Not only must the surveyor know how to set up and use sensitive equipment in all kinds of topography, he also must gather and process large

amounts of mathematical data that will be used by engineers and designers hundreds of miles away.

House says a big surveying job may cover up to 10 miles of ground. Measurements must be pinpoint-accurate. Even with high-tech equipment, a task of that size could take as long as three months to complete.

Favorite part of the job: “I get to see a lot of the Missouri countryside,” House says. “That and the people I work with are my favorite parts.”

Least favorite part: Taking measurements in highway traffic ... especially on Interstate 44.



What’s ahead: House says the biggest changes in his job will be technological, including the increased use of Global Positioning Systems, a plotting system that sends and receives signals from satellites and can pinpoint any location on earth within a few feet.

“GPS can get you within 50 feet of a land corner, allowing the surveyor to plot the longitude and latitude of a point almost exactly. And it will all be tied into a statewide system,” he says.

On a personal level, House has just been certified as a Registered Land Surveyor, following many years of training and testing.

After hours: House spends time with his wife, Danette, and their 16-year-old daughter, Suzanna. He also enjoys drag racing his 1972 470-horsepower Chevy Nova at the Ozark International Raceway in Rogersville. ■

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